

ELSEWHERE OVER THE RAINBOW

THE RAINBOW WORLD FUND IS THE BIGGEST INTERNATIONAL CHARITY ORGANISATION REPRESENTING THE GAY COMMUNITY. BEN HARRISON SPOKE TO FOUNDER AND CHAIRMAN JEFF COTTER.



Mother and child in Haiti awaiting international aid following a hurricane.

In the weeks following the New Orleans tragedy, Jeff Cotter's Rainbow World Fund raised thousands of dollars for relief from within the gay and lesbian community. Now, the charity is focussing on helping with the loss and devastation caused by the recent earthquake that struck Pakistan and India. Jeff Cotter, 42, works as a psychiatric social worker for the city of San Francisco and as chair of Rainbow World Fund.

DNA: Where did the idea to start a world humanitarian relief organisation with gay and lesbian people come from?

Jeff Cotter: I started Rainbow World Fund (RWF) five years ago because traditional relief organisations weren't developing philanthropy and consciousness in the LGBT community. It's this dual mission – direct relief, plus increasing awareness – that moves RWF. I wanted to do something, and, as with our community's response to HIV, I knew I couldn't wait for someone else to take leadership. As a gay man, I thought, if I want to change the world, I should start where I'm at, in the community I live in.

In addition to helping people, RWF is working to change the way the world sees



RWF fundraising art auction.

gay people by creating visibility for our communities compassion and concern for others. We are about showing the world who we really are and what we care about. We put our community's highest values into action: love, compassion, kindness.

Your background in is trauma recovery and HIV/AIDS case management. Did this prepare you for your current job?

I've found that social work and running RWF are both very different and similar at the same time. Both are focused on helping people. The social work is right here, every day, in my office, one-on-one, private and intimate, working with clients on issues specific to them. RWF is more about developing relationships with many

“Gay life isn't all about facial scrubs, expensive drinks and the latest dance remix.”

organisations and communities, setting priorities, building an infrastructure to support secure giving and encouraging others to get involved. One is micro, the other macro.

What's the main way you raise funds?

The majority of donations are through our website, which means that media coverage and web searches have been extremely important to our fundraising. We also work closely with gay churches and other gay groups. On a single Sunday afternoon in San Francisco in January, for example, we did a tsunami fundraiser at a leather bar and a gay country line-dancing party. We have received support from all over the world.

We are especially grateful for the recent donation we received from DNA's tsunami fundraiser. Thank you.

What's been your most successful event?

RWF was part of two big events in San Francisco in the past year. In February, OUTreachSF, a coalition of promoters, performers, artists and activists, put on a huge party/fundraiser. And, last November, we teamed up with Lucien Stern Productions, chanteuse Veronica Klaus, singer Mark Weigle, Armistead Maupin, Empress Donna Sachet, and the Sisters Of Perpetual Indulgence for a benefit concert supporting the RWF-CARE International Haitian Relief Fund. The concert was a great success – recording a CD to benefit future RWF relief efforts and raising funds to help Haiti recover from a series of hurricanes.

Do the think there's a perception that LGBT people are not compassionate?

Our community's response to the HIV/AIDS crisis demonstrated our capacity for activism and compassion. At the same time, we really can be rather obsessed with things that seem, well, frivolous. It isn't all about facial scrubs, expensive drinks and the latest dance remix, but sometimes it seems that way, you know? The challenge is balancing the fun stuff with the serious. Don't get me wrong, I'm all for fun and a little luxury but balance is key. Perspective and balance are two qualities that seem to be in short supply into today's world.

What does RWF want to achieve in the next five years?

We plan to keep raising funds and awareness. We'll continue to partner with the best relief organisations to support HIV/AIDS services, safe water, landmine eradication and hunger relief around the globe. We'll also deepen our LGBT outreach to reinforce our community's ties to the world at large. We'll continue to develop our capability to crisis response. We look forward to seeing the establishment of RWF chapters or similar organisations in other countries.

For more go to www.rainbowfund.org. During last year's Mardi Gras Fair Day, DNA sold magazines and raised \$1,000 for tsunami relief, which we donated to World Rainbow Fund. Many thanks to all who contributed.